

1. Novices should not use money

Novices in Shwe Oo Min Tawya are prohibited to use money, at least outside the Uposatha day (which is just four days per month). See my discussion in Burmese with a shopkeeper here - <https://youtu.be/EBVGrz41ihc> . This discussion simply contain more information on why novices should not use money – and why lay people should neither give (hand to hand) nor take (when selling) them.

2. ထီးတင်ပွဲ - The Festival of Placing (Golden) Umbrella on a Pagoda

Ma Zin Mar, a lady from Shwe Oo Min office has recently visited her native village at the western border Shan State, not far from Pyin Oo Lwin. At that time there was the festival of placing golden umbrella on pagoda (ထီးတင်ပွဲ - hti-tin-pwe), which happens either when pagoda is built and finished, or when the previous umbrella is replaced (when the old one was broken or the new one is better). See how the umbrella was sent to the pagoda here:

<https://youtu.be/PiWNynikZ7k> . Ma Zin Mar shared with me that some people believe, that the string that carries the umbrella is not enough to carry it. The umbrella would break on the way – and to prevent this disaster, the umbrella is sent with asseveration of truth (*saccakiriya*), an official proclamation of a Truth (a Buddhist teachings etc.).

Proclaiming “truth” in exchange for a wish to be fulfilled is common throughout later Pali scriptures (Commentaries), but there are marks of it even beyond Indian culture.

3. Shan Street Music


This is another video from Ma Zin Mar, this time related to Shan culture. You can see here a long-drum player (oh-si, အိုးစည်), a cymbalist (လင်းကွင်း) and a clappers-player (လက်ခုပ်) - <https://youtu.be/toorzgywT2Y> . These were playing on the way to the pagoda, where the umbrella was then placed.

4. Shan Rebels

Ma Zin Mar shared with me the present situation that darkens the minds of western Shans. Although this information is not publicly available in Myanmar, those who live near Kyauk Gu (ကျောက်ဂူ) Village know well for themselves. The Shan rebels (ရှမ်းသူပုန်) raid nearby villages and capture innocent people. While Ma Zin Mar was there, eleven people were captured – including women and young children. What happens to them is not known, she says. The Shan rebels have one objective – to gain autonomy for Shan State, to separate from Myanmar. Interestingly, young Shan boys know that “who passes eleventh grade of primary school, he may be accepted among the Shan Rebels” – and many, many Shan boys dream of joining them. Ma Zin Mar said, that if I ask a western Shan boy what does he want to be when adult, he’d reply – “After I pass the eleventh grade, I want to be a Shan Rebel.” If his parents hear him, he’ll be beaten.

5. Flat Feet

The Buddha is portrayed by various Pali scriptures as a Person with "32 Characteristics of Great Man" (mentioned for example in the *Lakkhaṇa Sutta* of DN 30). The very first of them is the "flat foot" (*suppatiṭṭhitapādo*), translated by Maurice Walshe as "feet with level tread". It means that the Buddha's sole is even. Have you ever seen the "Buddha's footprint"? There are many throughout Myanmar, often times as a part of a pagoda precincts.

	
<p>Mingun Moe Meit Set-Taw-Ya (Foot-Print 'up'), in Sagaing Region</p>	<p>Khyauk-Htut-Gyi Phayar in Yangon</p>

Well then, what is the scientists' view on flat foot? This started to be interesting for me only after I met a person who truly has a flat foot – an ordinary Sri Lankan man. I asked him – isn't it painful? Or problematic? And he readily answered that he had no pain, no problem. I have made a little research on Internet about this, so see below for some more information :-).

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flat_feet

There is a functional relationship between the structure of the arch of the foot and the biomechanics of the lower leg. The arch provides an elastic, springy connection between the forefoot and the hind foot. This association safeguards that a majority of the forces incurred during weight bearing of the foot can be dissipated before the force reaches the long bones of the leg and thigh.

⇒ This is to show the purpose of arched foot and therefore the main disadvantage when the foot is flat.

<http://www.foothealthfacts.org/footankleinfo/flatfoot.htm>

It usually occurs in both feet and progresses in severity throughout the adult years. As the deformity worsens, the soft tissues (tendons and ligaments) of the arch may stretch or tear and can become inflamed.

- ⇒ Interestingly, the flat foot might bring unpleasant feelings in an older age. Should we then think, that it is an appropriate mark of “a Great Man”?

<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/001262.htm>

Most flat feet do not cause pain or other problems. ... In older children and adults, flexible flat feet that do not cause pain or walking problems do not need further treatment.

<http://www.webmd.com/pain-management/what-are-fallen-arches>

Many people have flat feet -- and notice no problems and require no treatment.

- ⇒ It apparently depends on the person. Some persons have difficulties with there flat feet, and some have none ... ehm .. if they are not runners (see the links below).

<http://www.runsociety.com/2013/09/10/how-does-running-affect-me-if-i-have-flat-feet/>

<http://www.drnickcampos.com/health-newsletter/FootDysfunction.html>

It might be however possible, that translating “*suppatiṭṭhita*” as “flat foot” is not exactly precise. That is because “*su*” means “well”, and “*patiṭṭhita*” means “supported”. So, it is a “well supported foot”. I think anyone can imagine a way how to explain this otherwise than as flat foot. Although it would be no more in accordance with the later Senior Monk’s explanation, it would at least satisfy those who take “flat foot” for a disease, and the Buddha for a Great Man.

6. Sleep on your left side? Or right side?

There is an interesting advice from the Buddha, when it comes to the position in which we should sleep. In *Ariguttara Nikāya* 7.6.8. *Pacalāyamāna Sutta*, the Buddha advises ven. Moggallāna to sleep on his right side – “*dakkhiṇena passena siḥaseyyaṃ kappeyyāsi pāde pādaṃ accādhāya*” = “(you) should lie down in the lion’s posture, by (your) right side, covering one leg with the (other) leg.” This statement in one way or another occurs nearly thirty times in the *Sutta Piṭaka*, the *sutta* collection of *Tiṭṭaka*.

Monks (usually) sleep every night, and if we are going to take the Buddha’s advice seriously, we should at least think about it. What are the health benefits of sleeping on right side? What are the disadvantages of sleeping other way? Why would the Buddha repeat so many times this posture for sleeping, and none other?

Well then, see below results of my little Internet research :-)) .

<http://greatist.com/happiness/best-sleep-positions>

Doctors encourage sleeping on the left side during pregnancy because it improves circulation to the heart, which benefits both mom and baby. Side sleeping is also a pregnancy winner because sleeping on the back puts pressure on the lower back (which can lead to fainting) and stomach-sleeping is impossible for obvious reasons . For those not expecting, sleeping on the left side can also ease heartburn and acid reflux, making it easier for people with these conditions to doze off.

- ⇒ Read the website whole to know the pros&cons of other sleeping postures. In this quotation is mentioned sleeping on one's left side. There will be more information below :-)

<http://sb.cc.stonybrook.edu/news/general/150804sleeping.php#sthash.jkEK8abE.dpuf>

Sleeping in the lateral, or side position, as compared to sleeping on one's back or stomach, may more effectively remove brain waste and prove to be an important practice to help reduce the chances of developing Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and other neurological diseases, according to researchers at Stony Brook University.

- ⇒ Indeed, scientists found out that sleeping on one's side is good for the brain, not only for general physical health.

<http://www.healthylifetricks.com/this-is-why-you-should-be-sleeping-on-your-left-side/>

Sleeping on the right side is likely to worsen digestion problems, whereas sleeping on the left side may improve digestive symptoms. ... Sleeping on the left side is believed to greatly improve the health and even save lives. In holistic medicine, the left side of the body is the dominant lymphatic side, and while you're sleeping on this side, your body will have more time to filter toxins, lymph fluid, and waste through the thoracic duct and the lymph nodes.

On the other hand, sleeping on your right side may cause your lymphatic system to run more slowly. You don't want this to happen, because a lymphatic system that doesn't run at full efficiency can become incapable of filtering toxins or properly moving lymph fluid throughout the body. This increases your risk of deadly diseases due to the build-up of toxins.

- ⇒ So we have explained sleeping on left side vs. right side. Could it mean, that *dakkhiṇeṇa passena* actually means that the 'right side' is up? ... :-) Or maybe that the scientists got it wrong! Well, there's still more to say about sleeping on one's side -

<http://greatist.com/happiness/best-sleep-positions>

At the same time, sleeping on the left side can put pressure on the stomach and lungs (alternating sides often can help prevent organ strain). And as almost all side-sleepers know well, this position can result in the dreaded squished-arm-numbness. Snuggling into bed with the arm behind the head is a common sleep position, but it may adversely affect muscles and nerves. Resting the head (or the whole body) on a single arm can restrict blood flow and press down on the nerves, which results in "rubber arm" or painful pins and needles. In this position, the shoulder supports a lot of the body's weight, which can constrict the neck and shoulder muscles.

- ⇒ These are the drawbacks for those who are not careful. I do not bend my hand in this position, rather I keep it straight and sleep on the arm. This however is not the position of the reposing Buddha images – where the Buddha often times supports His head by His right hand.

7. Males vs. Females – by brain, no difference?

Both males and females may become Arahants. They have even similar brain capacity for that -

<http://news.sciencemag.org/brain-behavior/2015/11/brains-men-and-women-aren-t-really-different-study-finds>

Depending on whether the researchers looked at gray matter, white matter, or the diffusion tensor imaging data, between 23% and 53% of brains contained a mix of regions that fell on the male-end and female-end of the spectrum. Very few of the brains—between 0% and 8%—contained all male or all female structures. “There is no one type of male brain or female brain,” Joel says.

<http://mentalfloss.com/article/71811/there-no-difference-between-male-and-female-brains-study-finds>

The study, published in the journal PNAS, argues that if there were really such a thing as male and female brains, there wouldn't be much overlap in the characteristics of the two—people would show either only male or only female characteristics. However, after examining the brains of 1400 people aged 13 to 85 years old in terms of their composition of gray matter, white matter, and connections, the researchers found that very few people were clustered on the extreme ends of the spectrum of features typically associated with males and females. Rather, there was a lot of overlap. While some features were more common in female brains and others in males, most people have a mix of the two.

- ⇒ Well, so we have similar brains. This might be an advantage when we need to work things out together. However, it may have its drawbacks too. An interesting phenomenon that occurs throughout the Pāḷi scriptures, is that of “spontaneous sex change”. Already in the first rule explained in Vinaya Piṭaka, there are two mentions of spontaneous sex change, one for a monk, and one for a nun. Both of them may stay as nun/monk, their seniority does not change, and they should change to the group of their sex, i.e. nun should stay with nuns, monk with monks. And the Vinaya rules that are different for each of the sex are no more rules for these, because they have to follow only the rules that are common for both of the sexes.
- ⇒ The commentary then explains that losing one's maleness is because of a big bad kamma committed in the past, whereas losing femaleness is because of a minor bad kamma committed in the past. Gaining maleness is due to a big good *kamma*, gaining femaleness is due to a minor good *kamma*.

But, what do the scientists say? Does the modern science accept sex change in humans? We know well about animals that change sex on demand –

<http://voices.nationalgeographic.com/2013/09/22/7-gender-bending-animals/>

But as for human, that is not so well known. And even this I was able to research a bit :-)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sex_change

Several medical conditions can result in a natural sex change in humans, where the appearance at birth is somewhat, mostly, or completely of one sex, but changes over the course of a lifetime to being somewhat, mostly or completely of the other sex. The overwhelming majority of natural sex changes are from a female appearance at birth to a male appearance after puberty, due to either 5-alpha-reductase deficiency (5alpha-RD-2) or 17-beta-hydroxysteroid dehydrogenase deficiency (17beta-HSD-3).[8][9] A relative handful of male to female changes have been reported, and the etiologies of these are not well understood.

Genetic females (with two X chromosomes) with congenital adrenal hyperplasia lack an enzyme needed by the adrenal gland to make the hormones cortisol and aldosterone. Without these hormones, the body produces more androgens. This causes male sex characteristics to appear early (or inappropriately).[12][13][14]

Genetic males (with one X and one Y chromosome) with androgen insensitivity syndrome are resistant to androgens. As a result, the person has some or all of the physical characteristics of a female, despite having the genetic makeup of a male. The degree of sexual ambiguity varies widely in persons with incomplete AIS. Incomplete AIS can include other disorders such as Reifenstein syndrome which is associated with breast development in men.

See more information in these links:

- <http://rethinkingtheology.com/2014/07/24/spontaneous-change-in-sexual-orientation-it-does-happen/> - general information on sex-change
- <https://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20090113233627AAMZVGf> - various sources of information
- <http://aebrain.blogspot.com/> - a blog Zoe Brain, who changed from male to female
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n_DeixA0Rsc - a personal account of Zoe Brain as a video.

8. Eating Suggestions - for tea, oil, and bamboo shoots

- ✓ Eating tea is very common in Myanmar, and with it is also well known the unpleasant smell that it then causes in one's mouth. I have found in this website - <http://thithtoolwin.health.mmbloggers.com/Home/Detail/4714763926727600833> - that to prevent from that smell it is possible to keep four or five groundnuts in one's mouth for about a minute. This would then eradicate the bad smell. This is very interesting, because it has certainly a lot to do with the biochemical properties of the groundnuts. It is also very reminiscent of "oil swishing", an old ayurvedic practice coming from India (see more on the unbelievable health benefits of oil swishing here - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oil_pulling).
- ✓ Another practical information that you may learn from <http://thithtoolwin.health.mmbloggers.com/Home/Detail/4714763926727600833> is regarding over-oily meals. It seems that the author is aware of the health disadvantages that come with eating too oily meals, and suggests a solution. The suggestion here is either to eat a quarter of lemon (or a spoonful of its juice) before the meal, or chew the mint leaves (pudina, ပုစိန်၊ ပုစိန်) that are prepared next to the rice-meal.
- ✓ And even one more interesting advice you can find in this very article. It is well known, that bamboo shoots have bad effect on heart diseases. To alleviate it, first crush the (uncooked) bamboo shoots together with lemon juice, knead it well, clean it with water and strain it. Then cook it and eat it. Or add the lemon juice in the cooked bamboo shoots and (still keeping pot on the stove) after stirring them well remove the pot from stove and eat it. (I think that monks who have heart disease may suggest this to their regular supporters in case if the supporters enjoy donating cooked bamboo shoots. Or say nothing, and just meditate like Ajahn Lee Dhammadharo. You may become an Arahant.)

May all beings be happy! :-)

monk Sarana